

Message Text

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ACTION SIL-01

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00
EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 HA-05 IO-13
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R 221701Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 080
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1341

PARIS FOR LABATT; BRUSSELS FOR USEC/LABATT

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB TS PORG
SUBJ: BACKGROUND DISCUSSIONS WITH OTTO KERSTEN

REF: TUNIS 1343

1. OTTO KERSTEN, SEC GEN ICFTU, REQUESTED DISCUSSION WITH
AMBASSADOR FEB 20 AS HEAD OF ICFTU DELEGATION WHICH
VISITED TUNISIA TO SEEK THE RELEASE OF HABIB ACHOUR AND
OTHER UGTT EXECUTIVE OFFICERS NOW IN POLICE CUSTODY. THE
UGTT LEADERSHIP WAS ARRESTED IN THE WAKE OF SEVERE CIVIL
DISTURBANCES WHICH ACCURED JANUARY 26 AND 27, 1978.
MR. KERSTEN EXPLAINED THAT MEMBERS OF HIS DELEGATION HAD
FANNED OUT OVER TUNIS TO ASCERTAIN THE CURRENT SITUATION.
IN THE COURSE OF THEIR INQUIRIES, EACH OF THEM CALED UPON
HIS RESPECTIVE AMBASSADOR (FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLLAND, AND
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ITALY, AND THE HE, KERSTEN AHD REQUESTED
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR "ALTHOUGH THE
AFL-CIO HAD NOT YET REJOINED ICFTU."

2. KERSTEN'S DELEGATION ""HAD NOT COME TO TUNISIA FOR
NOTHING:" ITS GOALS WERE TO VISIT ACHOUR PERSONALLY TO AS-
CERTAIN HIS WELFARE, TO DEMAND HIS RELEASE FROM IMPRESONMENT,

AND IF GOT LODGES CRIMINAL CHARGES, TO DEMAND A FAIR AND OPEN TRIAL. THE AMBASSADOR ASSURED MR. KERSTEN THAT PRIME MINISTER HIDI NOUIRA, ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS, HAD ALREADY "GUARANTEED" FAIR AND OPEN TRIALS FOR ACHOUR AND COMPANY. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT SUCH TRIALS WOULD, IN FACT, PRESENT A DILEMMA FOR THE GOT: MUCH OF ITS CASE DERIVES FROM ALLEGATIONS FOR FOREIGN (READ: LIBYAN) INFLUENCE AND AGITATION. HOWEVER THIS EVIDENCE COULD NOT BE READ INTO A PUBLIC TRIAL RECORD WITHOUT SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES TO TUNISIAN/LIBYAN RELATIONS.

3. MR. KERSTEN ACCOMPANIED BY HIS DELEGATION KEPT AN APPOINTMENT WITH NOUIRA FEBRUARY 21. HE SAID HIS INTENTION WAS TO IMPRESS UPON THE GOVERNMENT THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH THE ICFTU (AND BTL TENSION THE RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS) VIEWS THESE ARRESTS AND PROLONGED DETENTIONS. HE MENTIONED A POSSIBLE TOURISM BOYCOTT AS ONE ECONOMIC PRESSURE TACTIC THAT ICFTU MIGHT EMPLOY AGAINST GOT IF ITS DEMANDS WERE REFUSED. HE SAID, TOO, THAT ICFTU COULD NOT POSSIBLY RECOGNIZE THE NEW UGTT LEADERSHIP WHILE ITS ELECTED OFFICERS REMAINED INCARCERATED. MEANWHILE, HE MENTIONED THAT ONE MEMBER OF HIS DELEGATION ALREADY HAD HELD DISCUSSIONS IN PARIS WITH FARHAT DACHRAOUI, THE PROBABLE FRONT-RUNNER TO REPLACE HABIB ACHOUR AS UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL.

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4. THE ICFTU SECRETARY GENERAL ALLEGED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A RECENT PRIVATE COMMUNICATION FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA CONCERNING THE UGTT ARRESTS WHICH HAD DEMANDED RELEASE OF ACHOUR AND MEMBERS OF HIS EXECUTIVE BOARD.

5. DISCUSSING MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS, KERSTEN SAID BONIFACE KABORE FROM UPPER VOLTA WAS INCLUDED IN THE ICFTU DELEGATION EXPRESSLY TO COUNTER POSITIONS FAVORABLE TO GOT TAKEN RECENTLY BY THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN TRADE UNION UNITY (OATUU). KABORE, ALSO A MEMBER OF THAT ORGANIZATION, APPARENTLY IS A RIVAL OF DINIS AKUMU FOR ITS SECRETARY GENERALSHIP. TURNING AGAIN TOWARD THE UPCOMING UGTT NATIONAL CONGRESS OF FEB 25, THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT IT WAS USUAL PRACTICE TO INVITE HEADS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS AS OBSERVERS AND TOLD KERSTEN HE WAS MULLING OVER THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF OUR ACCEPTANCE IN THE EVENT WE WERE INVITED. KERSTEN SAID HE FELT WE SHOULD ATTEND THE SESSION TO OBSERVE PROCEDURES, BUT THAT REPRESENTATION SHOULD BE AT LEVEL WHICH WOULD NOT ENCOURAGE GOT TO TRANSFORM OUR ATTENDANCE INTO AN IMPLIED ENDORSEMENT.

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